

21 would be allowed, and that consideration would be given to Applicants' remarks traversing the §103(a) rejection of claims 13-16 (see Interview Summary, Paper No. 34).

In the Official Action, claims 1-12 and 19-21 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over European Patent Document No. 232,121 (*EP '121*) in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,197,371 (*Holst et al*). This rejection has been withdrawn in light of the Examiners' indication that claims 1-12 and 19-21 are allowable (see Interview Summary).

Claims 13-16 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being obvious over U.S. Patent No. 4,250,306 (*Lask et al*) in view of an English abstract of Japanese Patent Document No. 01-148874 (*JP '874*). Withdrawal of this rejection is respectfully requested for at least the following reasons.

According to one aspect of the present invention as defined by claim 13, a polysaccharide fiber is provided comprising a polysaccharide fiber having been produced according to the method of claim 1. According to another aspect of the present invention as defined by claim 15, an absorbent structure in an absorbent article is provided, wherein the absorbent structure includes polysaccharide fibers having been produced according to claim 1. Claim 1, which the Patent Office has indicated as being allowable, recites a method of producing polysaccharide fibers comprising the steps of dissolving a polysaccharide in a solvent to form a solution, and spraying the solution into a bath which contains a water-miscible organic solvent and a cross-linker, wherein the solvent dissolving the polysaccharide is water, and wherein the cross-linker ionically cross-links the polysaccharide.

*Lask et al* relates to a process for preparing swellable cross-linked carboxyalkylcelluloses from natural cellulose or cellulose hydrate (col. 1, lines 8-10).

*Lask et al* does not disclose or suggest each feature of aspects of the present invention as defined by claims 13 and 15. For example, *Lask et al* fails to disclose or suggest a polysaccharide fiber having been produced according to the method of claim 1, as is recited in claims 13 and 15.

In this regard, claim 1 recites that the cross-linker ionically cross-links the polysaccharide. That is, the polysaccharide fiber produced by the method of claim 1 is ionically cross-linked. By comparison, *Lask et al* merely discloses that "the cross-linking is a reaction with phosphorus oxychloride, acrylamidomethylenechloroacetamide or with a compound which carries at least one of the following functional groups reactive towards hydroxyl groups" (col. 10, lines 30-54). Clearly, there is no disclosure or suggestion that the carboxyalkylcellulose of *Lask et al* is ionically cross-linked.

*JP '874* fails to cure the above-described deficiency of *Lask et al*. Like *Lask et al*, *JP '874* does not disclose or suggest an ionically cross-linked polysaccharide fiber, as is recited in claims 13 and 15. Rather, *JP '874* merely discloses carboxymethylating a cellulose fiber by using monochloroacetic acid, and treating it in a non-swelling solvent of the carboxymethylcellulose by using a compound for crosslinking the vicinity of the surface of the fiber into high density. *JP '874* simply has no disclosure or suggestion that the resulting product thereof constitutes an ionically cross-linked polysaccharide fiber.

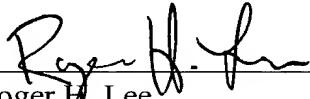
For at least the reasons set forth above, no *prima facie* case of obviousness has been established. Accordingly, withdrawal of the §103(a) rejection over *Lask et al* in view of *JP '874* is respectfully requested.

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From the foregoing, further and favorable action in the form of a Notice of Allowance is believed to be next in order, and such action is earnestly solicited. If the Examiner has any questions relating to this paper, or the application in general, he is invited to telephone the undersigned at his earliest convenience.

Respectfully submitted,

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